

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Dwight Morrow, an American businessman and diplomat, once held a dinner party to which Calvin Coolidge had been invited. After Coolidge left, Morrow told the remaining guests that Coolidge would make a good president.

The others disagreed. They felt Coolidge was too quiet, that he lacked color and personality. No one would like him, they said.

Morrow's daughter Anne, then age six, spoke up: "I like him." Then she displayed a finger with a small bandage around it. "He was the only one at the party who asked about my sore finger."

"And THAT is why he would make a good president," added Morrow.

Leadership is interesting in that way. We often look to those with great charisma, inspiring words, or impressive credentials. But truly great leadership comes from those whom you know you can trust because they lead lives of empathy, integrity, and compassion.

It's what Jesus did - displaying to us the incredible humility of the God of all Creation entering into human flesh just so that He could live among us, spend time with us, eat with us, teach us, sometimes even argue with us...and ultimately to die for us that we might live.

Interestingly the rest of the NT tells us that it's FOR THAT REASON that Jesus is lifted high and exalted, His name higher than any other name. Not JUST because of the fact of His divinity, but because of the startling miracle of His humanity.

This morning for our scripture reflection, we'll be continuing in a series from the book of 1 Timothy - a letter from the Apostle Paul to his young friend who has been given the charge to defend against false teaching within the church in Ephesus.

In chapter 3, Paul gives some specific instruction on this issue of leadership within the church, particularly in relation to this mystery of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and glory.

Turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 3:

READING

1 Timothy 3:¹ Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

¹¹ In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁴ Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He appeared in the flesh,
 was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
 was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
 was taken up in glory.

There's 3 main points about leadership I think we should take away from this passage today - (1) that church leadership is vital for protecting spiritual health of the congregation; (2) that church leadership sets the pace for morality and integrity in the church; and (3) that church leadership, in and of itself, proclaims the message of Christ.

I'll get to all 3 of these in the course of time, but first I want to give a disclaimer that this message IS actually important for you to listen to. I say that just because the theme here is on church leadership and some of you may hear that and think - "well, alright, that doesn't really apply to me I guess so I can just check out for the next little bit."

Not the case. What Paul has to say here is actually really important for how we understand our life together in Jesus.

I'm using the term "church leadership" on purpose as well. Paul speaks of 2 different roles here "episkopos" is the first, which we translate as either overseer or supervisor, sometimes referred to elsewhere in conjunction with the terms elder or pastor.

The second term is "diaconos" which we translate as deacon - generally meaning someone who serves and assists in the church.

It's not entirely clear what specific responsibilities Paul tied to these roles - his letters to Timothy and elsewhere seem to presume the recipients know what he's talking about. But it's sufficient to just say - these are leaders in the church.

I. CHURCH LEADERSHIP PROTECTS CHURCH HEALTH (1).

And here's the thing that immediately stuck out to me in this passage:

Paul starts the chapter, "whoever aspires to this role of supervision and leadership in the church desires a noble task."

As a church leader myself - that struck me, because I immediately thought, "I'm not sure I ever really hear that."

I don't mean that I feel underappreciated. That's not true at all - as a church, you all do an amazing job loving and valuing both me and my family.

But when it comes to the idea and the role of a Pastor or church leadership in general, the kinds of thoughts and assumptions that come to mind are generally negative.

For some people, including myself, the thought of a pastor just brings to mind a really tame, nice sort of person who knows a lot about the Bible and you aren't supposed to cuss around them.

Also, I don't know why, but I always picture a sweater-vest. I actually even got a sweater vest when I first got into ministry, just because I felt like it was necessary.

None of those things are bad...it just feels a tad irrelevant and out of touch with most people's normal lives.

Scripture even has some not-as-flattering things to say about the role. The more famous passage about aspiring to leadership is in James 3:1 where it says "not many should become teachers, because you'll be judged more strictly." Not exactly the kind of thing you'd want to say at a career day.

In the worst case scenarios, when people think of church leaders, they think of people who have abused that position and wounded others in the process. And so they want nothing to do with them.

Generally irrelevant, out-of-touch, judged more strictly than others, and probably for good reason, because when we get it wrong we really wound people.

So why would anyone ever want to be a leader in a church?

Paul says its because this is a noble and meaningful role - probably because he senses the need for it most acutely.

He plays a pivotal role in bringing the Gospel to new areas and setting up the organization for the church there, but then he moves on and he needs other leaders to fill the gap to help the congregation flourish and grow.

He plants the church, but someone else has to water it and tend to the ongoing health of the congregation, to help steward the disciple-making mission of the church.

In Paul's view, stable and consistent CHURCH LEADERSHIP IS VITAL TO PROTECTING THE HEALTH OF THE CHURCH.

Without good leaders - pastors, deacons, teachers, worship teams, board members - any of them - without good leadership, it can be entirely too easy to drift off course.

For the record, I'm not saying this because I want to make shore up my job security - I'm saying this because I want you all to want my job. We need more workers for the harvest.

I can say from my personal experience, providing nurturing and visionary leadership for the ongoing formation of a community of Christ-followers is one of the most rewarding and meaningful vocations I can even imagine. It's the kind of thing I'd do whether I was paid or not.

The spiritual health of individuals and a community is affected by way more than just Sunday morning services - it's the total impact of lives lived together, and all the messiness that comes with that.

When you participate in a faith community in any capacity, you are being shaped and formed in both intentional and unintentional ways. It is incredibly important to have rooted, integrous, capable leaders to help guide the community.

II. CHURCH LEADERSHIP SETS THE PACE FOR INTEGRITY & FAITH (2-13).

Did you notice that when Paul lists the qualifications he thinks are necessary for overseers and deacons, he says almost NOTHING about practical skills.

They're largely based upon moral character rather than any specific skill-sets. He notes that leaders should be able to teach and preach, and that deacons should be able to keep hold of truths of the faith with clear consciences.

Otherwise, all the requirements given are related to character and integrity.

- Above reproach, sincere, not double-tongued or malicious talkers
- Temperate, and specifically, not given to drunkenness, wise, peaceable, kind
- I love this one - "husband of one wife" - literally in the Greek it's just "one wife husband" - like "he needs to be a one woman kind a guy"
- They shouldn't be lovers of money or pursue dishonest gain.
- They should be trustworthy and have a good public reputation.

These are all character issues, not skills. They all have to do with trustworthiness.

Interestingly, there are actually studies that have been done that measure what people value more - trustworthiness or skill.

Obviously, the most desired outcome in choosing a leader would be to have someone who was both trustworthy AND skilled.

But perhaps surprisingly, when forced to choose between a trustworthy leader with notable lack of skills OR a very skilled leader with questionable integrity - people seem to choose integrity every time.

Now, here's the really surprising bit though, when asked to choose between a untrustworthy person with NO skills and an untrustworthy person who was highly skilled, most people chose the person with NO skills and dubious character. Judging, I assume, that at least the person with fewer skills can't do as much damage.

CHARACTER IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN COMPETENCE

Because while skills show WHAT a person can do, character displays HOW they'll do it.

I think Paul gives the overwhelming amount of his attention to issues of character, perhaps because character, otherwise viewed through the lens of the "fruit of the Spirit," gives the clearest window into someone's core identity.

If a leader rests their identity in anything other than Christ and the true Gospel, then significant character flaws will follow not far behind.

The point here isn't that leaders should be perfect. If that were the case, none of us would be worthy.

The point is that the people we select as our spiritual leaders and guides model to us and the rest of the world what the deepest truths of our faith should produce in our lives.

An analogy I'm fond of is that following a pastor or mentor in the faith is like drafting in a long-distance race.

I ran cross country in high school and there was always a few runners that were just way too fast to keep up with. They ran great races. Good for them.

They'll run a great race, but they won't necessarily help anyone along the way. They might inspire some through their feats. But there's also those who are obvious frontrunners, but they run at a speed you can attain. When you run directly behind them, they take the brunt of the wind resistance and ease the way for you.

That's part of my job with you all - to set the pace - to go out in front and let you draft off of me.

And as you draft off me, others can draft off you.

But this whole race can only be run because Christ already cleared a way for us.

III. CHURCH LEADERSHIP PROCLAIMS CHRIST (14-16).

Paul grounds all of his instructions and advice about order in the church within this Christ hymn at the end of the chapter:

He [Jesus] appeared in the flesh,
 was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
 was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
 was taken up in glory.

The reason we ought to care about our spiritual leadership and godliness is Christ's own incarnation, vindication, and exaltation.

The God of the universe came in the flesh in the person of Jesus.

And while He submitted to death on a cross for our redemption and salvation, He was vindicated - or proved justified and victorious - by the power of the Holy Spirit through His resurrection.

Angels witnessed His glory, and His Gospel was preached and believed in the nations.

And He has been exalted and taken up in glory, the sign of His triumph as He now sits at the right hand of the Father and prepares a place for us to dwell with Him upon His return.

It's because of this Gospel that we ought to care about living godly lives, transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, led in community by people of integrity and commitment to the Truth.

Not just ME, but all of the spiritual leadership among us.

CONCLUSION

A few questions I'd like to leave you with this morning:

What exactly do you expect when you come to church? Why?

What do you expect from your spiritual leaders? From me? From your deacons?

What do you expect from yourself?

What do you expect from Jesus?

Because your answers to those questions will greatly determine what you receive and how you receive it.